

October 1, 2012

The Honorable Tom Vilsack Secretary of Agriculture U.S. Department of Agriculture Jamie L. Whitten Federal Building, Room 200-A 1400 Independence Avenue, SW Washington, D.C. 20250 The Honorable Dave White Chief Natural Resource Conservation Service U.S. Department of Agriculture Room 5105-A 1400 Independence Avenue, SW Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack and Chief White:

As a result of the House of Representatives' failure to pass the bipartisan Senate reauthorization of the Farm Bill, the current Farm Bill will expire on September 30, 2012. Without an extension of the Farm Bill, our agriculture laws will revert to depression-era agriculture policy, including costly subsidies and price controls, creating harm and uncertainty for many of our farmers. Inaction also means many of the programs our farmers depend on – like the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Initiative (CBWI) – will no longer exist and no longer receive funding. As we continue to work with our House colleagues to pass a Farm Bill extension, we ask that you use the resources available to help buffer the loss of those programs that are expiring.

CBWI provides farmers in our states with essential resources they need to meet the conservation challenges of farming in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Our farmers have come to rely on this important program, so much so, that the sudden expiration of the CBWI may not only come as a surprise, but also may dramatically impact many of our farmers' bottom lines.

That is why we urge you to fully inform all Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) field staff in the Chesapeake Bay watershed about the implications of the expiration of this program and have them disseminate this information to the agriculture community. Specifically, we ask that field staff be prepared to help the Chesapeake Bay region's agricultural communities navigate the consequences of this expiration including the terms of existing CBWI contracts, NRCS's ability to write new CBWI contracts, and other USDA-NRCS conservation resources that are available to farmers in the interim.

Providing timely information on CBWI and other possible supplemental resources will be incredibly important for our farmers' planning purposes. Requiring NRCS field staff to reach out to affected farmers during this time of uncertainty, will also help maintain and improve their working relationship with the communities they serve and will demonstrate their commitment and support for our farmers' efforts to conserve natural resources in the Chesapeake Bay region.

We would appreciate being kept informed of USDA-NRCS's actions to disseminate information on the CBWI and if we can help in any way please contact our offices. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

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